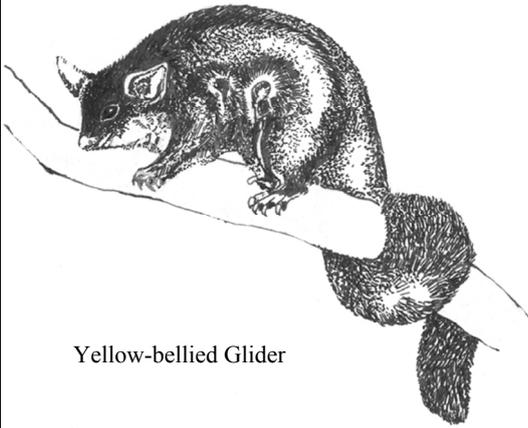


GLIDERS IN OUR AREA - DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

We all appreciate our forests and bush in the daylight, but it is in the night that most of our Australian marsupials come out to forage and socialise. We have some spectacular species right on our backdoor, species that have developed a very efficient method of moving from tree to tree – these are the gliders.

Yellow-bellied Glider – *Petaurus australis*



Yellow-bellied Glider

In our region, the Yellow-bellied Glider is restricted to stands of mature eucalypts, which provide both shelter in hollows, and a food source. Gliders will chew out a characteristic V shape into the smooth bark eucalypts (mainly Blue-gum *E. globulus*), each night revisiting a number of these feed-trees while they exude their nutritious sap.

This species is distinguished from our other resident glider, *P. breviceps*, by their larger size and impressive call – a very loud, shrieking cackle that winds up and up, before rattling down. They perform varieties of this call, especially during their skilful glides, which carry them between trees and down valleys over long distances. The local population is currently healthy, but this has varied greatly in the past, with the population bouncing back after Ash Wednesday, only to have drought and predation by Powerful Owls take their toll.

Sugar Glider – *Petaurus breviceps*

One of Australia’s most widespread marsupials, with a range spanning from south-eastern South Australia to the north-west of Western Australia, the Sugar Glider is another of our amazing, nocturnal, forest inhabitants. This species requires mature open forest, with access to hollows and acacias, preferring the sap and blossom of this genus for its diet. Sugar Gliders also use their strong front incisors to carve into a suitable eucalypt feed-tree, but can also be seen taking advantage of the cuts made by *P. australis*.

They live in large family groups, with up to seven individuals sharing the same hollow, and sometimes groups can also be seen feeding together, with each individual using its own incision in the tree. Sugar Gliders are quieter than their larger cousins, communicating by high pitched *yips* and *chirs*.



Sugar Glider

Feather-tail Glider – *Acrobates pygmaeus*

With a total length of less than 20 cm, and a habit of moving rapidly through the canopy of tall eucalypts, it is no wonder that this species is one of our most rarely seen inhabitants. However, the world’s smallest, gliding mammal is widespread through mature forests with a high diversity of shrub species (their diet requires year round blossoms). The species is named for its unique tail, which is hairless, except for two lines of stiff, lateral hairs. This gives it the feathery appearance, and helps control glides of up to 25 metres.

If you would like to see some of our local gliders and other nocturnal animals, please lookout for ANGAIR spotlighting walks, this summer.

Reference: Menkhorst & Knight 2001, *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.



Feather-tail Glider

Pete (Possum) Crowcroft

Eco-Logic Education and Environmental Services, Anglesea.

Drawings by Kaye Traynor

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